

MESSAGE

FROM THE

PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES,

**STATING THE INTERPRETATION WHICH HAS BEEN GIVEN TO THE
ACT ENTITLED "AN ACT IN ADDITION TO THE ACTS
PROHIBITING THE SLAVE TRADE."**

DECEMBER 20, 1819.

Read, and referred to the Committee on so much of the Message of the President of the United States as relates to the unlawful introduction of slaves into the United States.

WASHINGTON :

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MESSAGE.**TO THE SENATE AND HOUSE OF
REPRESENTATIVES OF THE UNITED STATES:**

Some doubt being entertained respecting the true intent and meaning of the act of the last session, entitled "An act in addition to the acts prohibiting the slave trade," as to the duties of the agents, to be appointed on the coast of Africa, I think it proper to state the interpretation which has been given of the act, and the measures adopted to carry it into effect, that Congress may, should it be deemed advisable, amend the same, before further proceeding is had under it.

The obligation to instruct the commanders of all our armed vessels to seize and bring into port all ships or vessels of the United States, wheresoever found, having on board any negro, mulatto, or person of color, in violation of former acts for the suppression of the slave trade, being imperative, was executed without delay. No seizures have yet been made, but, as they were contemplated by the law, and might be presumed, it seemed proper to make the necessary regulations applicable to such seizures for carrying the several provisions of the act into effect.

It is enjoined on the executive to cause all negroes, mulattoes, or persons of color, who may be taken under the act, to be removed to Africa. It is the obvious import of the law, that none of the persons thus taken should remain within the United States; and no place other than the coast of Africa being designated, their removal, or delivery, whether carried from the United States or landed immediately from the vessels in which they were taken, was supposed to be confined to that coast. No settlement or station being specified, the whole coast was thought to be left open for the selection of a proper place, at which the persons, thus taken, should be delivered. The executive is authorized to appoint one or more agents, residing there, to receive such persons; and one hundred thousand dollars are appropriated for the general purposes of the law.

On due consideration of the several sections of the act, and of its humane policy, it was supposed to be the intention of Congress, that all the persons above described, who might be taken under it, and landed in Africa, should be aided in their return to their former homes, or in their establishment at, or near, the place where landed. Some shelter and food would be necessary for them there, as soon as landed, let their subsequent disposition be what it might. Should they be landed without such provision having been previously made,

they might perish. It was supposed, by the authority given to the executive, to appoint agents residing on that coast, that they should provide such shelter and food, and perform the other beneficent and charitable offices contemplated by the act. The coast of Africa having been little explored, and no persons residing there, who possessed the requisite qualifications to entitle them to the trust, being known to the executive, to none such could it be committed. It was believed that citizens only, who would go hence, well instructed in the views of their government, and zealous to give them effect, would be competent to these duties, and that it was not the intention of the law to preclude their appointment. It was obvious that the longer these persons should be detained in the United States in the hands of the marshals, the greater would be the expense, and that for the same term would the main purpose of the law be suspended. It seemed, therefore, to be incumbent on me to make the necessary arrangements for carrying this act into effect in Africa, in time to meet the delivery of any persons who might be taken by the public vessels, and landed there under it.

On this view of the policy and sanctions of the law, it has been decided, to send a public ship to the coast of Africa, with two such agents, who will take with them tools, and other implements, necessary for the purposes above mentioned. To each of these agents a small salary has been allowed—fifteen hundred dollars to the principal, and twelve hundred to the other. All our public agents on the coast of Africa receive salaries for their services, and it was understood that none of our citizens, possessing the requisite qualifications, would accept these trusts, by which they would be confined to parts the least frequented and civilized, without a reasonable compensation. Such allowance, therefore, seemed to be indispensable to the execution of the act. It is intended, also, to subject a portion of the sum appropriated, to the order of the principal agent, for the special objects above stated, amounting in the whole, including the salaries of the agents for one year, to rather less than one third of the appropriation. Special instructions will be given to these agents, defining, in precise terms, their duties, in regard to the persons thus delivered to them; the disbursement of the money by the principal agent; and his accountability for the same. They will also have power to select the most suitable place, on the coast of Africa, at which all persons who may be taken under this act shall be delivered to them, with an express injunction to exercise no power founded on the principle of colonization, or other power than that of performing the benevolent offices above recited, by the permission and sanction of the existing government under which they may establish themselves. Orders will be given to the commander of the public ship in which they will sail, to cruize along the coast, to give the more complete effect to the principal object of the act.

JAMES MONROE.

Washington, December 17th, 1819.